

Title of report: Schools Budget 2023/24

Meeting: Schools Forum

Meeting date: Friday 13 January 2023

Report by: Schools Finance Manager

Supplementary information from the Budget Working Group

1. The report to the Schools Forum on the Schools Budget 2023/24 includes details of the final DSG settlement as published by government on 16 December 2022 and recommendations on allocations from the council. It does not include any comment from the Budget Working Group (BWG) referring only to the submission of this supplementary report from the Group.
2. The BWG met on 6 January 2023 and considered the proposals set out in the report to the forum. Due to the final DSG settlement being insufficient to fully fund the National Funding Formula (NFF) factors for 2023/24, three options were put before the BWG as set out in paragraph 5 of the original report:
 - a. Reduce NFF factors by 0.26% and remove the SEN protection scheme;
 - b. Reduce NFF factors by 0.5% and significantly reduce the SEN protection scheme;
 - c. Reduce NFF factors by 1% and approve £0.616m transfer to fund the SEN protection scheme at a similar level to 22/23. This is the council's preferred option and is set out in detail in the recommendations in the original report.
3. The BWG support the continuation of the SEN protection scheme and feel that removing or significantly reducing the scheme could be counter-productive as it could lead to more pupils needing more expensive specialist places rather than being included in mainstream schools. This would exacerbate pressure on the high needs block.
4. The BWG note that the continuation of the supplementary grant scheme in 2023/24 means schools will receive £4.15m in addition to the distribution through the funding formula which is an increase of £0.85m on the £3.3m supplementary grant received by schools in 2022/23. This increase will more than make up for the proposed reduction in the NFF values.
5. **The BWG therefore recommend Option C above, and support the recommendations as set out in the original report to the schools forum.**
6. As the reduction to the NFF factors was not included in the autumn consultation with schools, the BWG recommended that a presentation was also made at the school leaders' webinar on 10 January 2023. Those in attendance indicated their support for the proposals.

7. At its meeting on 2 December 2023 the BWG received an update on the nurture group project and the results achieved so far by the pilot schools. Officers and headteachers involved were pleased with the project overall and felt that it should be continued and, funds permitting, expanded to give better geographical coverage. An update on two satellite projects to the nurture group work will be provided at the next meeting of the BWG on 3 March.
8. Officers will include the feedback from the BWG in proposals for the high needs budget which will come before the Schools Forum in March 2023.
9. The BWG also received an update on the arrangements and charges relating to permanent exclusions. Schools Forum is asked to note that the £7k contribution for pupils permanently excluded applies to both primary and secondary pupils. While it is rare for primary pupils to be permanently excluded there have been recent cases and primary schools should be aware this contribution will be expected. A communication to all schools will be included in the next edition of spotlight to raise awareness.

Recommendation(s)

There are no changes to the recommendations set out in the original report to the forum.